

## U.S. Cannot Afford to Take Wait-and-See Attitude When It Comes to Disarming Iraq

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One of the country's leading editorial writers, Charles Krauthammer, recently wrote that the central problem of the 21st century is "the conjunction of terrorism, rogue states and weapons of mass destruction."

Most of us prefer not to think about that — the awful destruction and death that results from the combination of terrorist groups, outlaw states, and technologies that can kill millions. As unpleasant as the topic may be, however, we cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand.

The cold, hard reality of these times is that such weapons do exist and they are spreading around the world. The truth is that there are groups and individuals whose primary aim is to kill as many Americans as possible and they are quite willing to die to do it. Whether we fight back or not, America is at war.

September 11, 2001, was the opening shot in this new war. Iraq will probably be the next battlefield. Others will come, for this war will last a long time.

We hope that the actual fighting in Iraq will end quickly. There are serious dangers which our troops could face, including the use of chemical or biological weapons against them, and we trust that they will be as prepared as possible for

whatever confronts them. No one doubts, however, that the U.S. military will prevail.

I have been asked, "Why now? We have lived with Saddam Hussein for more than ten years since the Gulf War. Can't we just wait and see what happens?" My answer is that we could decide to wait, but whatever the risks of military action now may be, the risks of waiting are far greater.

We know what kind of person Saddam Hussein is. He has murdered with his own hands; he is responsible for the torture and death of many, many people. We know that he has a very large number of chemical weapons and of biological weapons, and we know that he is using every resource available to him to acquire nuclear weapons. We know that he will not hesitate to use such weapons. He has used them before, in war and against his own people.

We could decide to wait until he uses them again — or until he gives them to some terrorist group like Al Qaeda. But if we wait, our job will be even harder in the future and the resulting devastation will not rest easily on our consciences.

Unfortunately there are some other nations that have a financial interest in continuing to work with the current government of Iraq. Others are taking a wait-and-see approach. The United States cannot afford to take such a path. We are the primary target, and we have the responsibility of world leadership. No one else can do it.

Our work will not be over once the shooting stops. Just as our continued involvement in Europe and in Japan after World War II led to decades of stability and economic growth, true success in Iraq will require years of effort. We will work with others — perhaps including some of those who refuse to join in the initial military action — to help the Iraqi people get back on their feet and to develop a stable, democratic government. We will have to look for ways to give the millions of Muslim young people around the world hope for a brighter future so that they will not be such easy prey for the terrorist recruiters.

Tough challenges lie ahead, but a bright light during these gloomy times can be found in America's past. We have faced tough times before at places like Valley Forge, Gettysburg, and Iwa Jima. Americans always have risen to the challenge, guided by our strong faith and indomitable spirit. I have no doubt we will do so again.